

Walking Together on the Same Path

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“These are not clinicians explaining autism, or a family support group talking about programme and expectations, or parents sharing how their lives were changed by a diagnosis of autism in their child. Instead, it is a group of young people in their 20s with a diagnosis of autism talking to the public (with autism or not) about their experiences, what they have come to understand, and what they feel and expect others to understand.” Jose, the father of twin adult sons on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), so described the unique and vital role of the Young Adults of the Tu Y Yo programme, an autism awareness outreach project to Spanish-speaking immigrants in the Chicago, USA area.

These bilingual Young Adults, themselves diagnosed on the ASD as children, were trained in Child to Child methodology to work with younger children with autism and their siblings.



The group of Young Adults after doing a presentation at YMCA in 2014.

Identifying issues and taking action

Using [Child to Child's Six Step approach](#), the Young Adults helped the children on the ASD identify “bullying“ as the issue that most concerns them. Exploring the theme through child-friendly techniques, the Young Adults and children pinpointed the lack of understanding about autism as a key cause of bullying and decided to conduct an autism educational campaign. For the adults, they designed a presentation on the myths and realities of autism which they presented at various community events.

However, the Young Adults realised they needed more dynamic techniques for working with children, so they incorporated drawing into their activities. **The Young Adults wrote and illustrated colourful storyboards that emphasised tolerance and acceptance of differences.** The storyboards featured an elephant with just one tusk and a giraffe with a short neck who became friends and soon made friends with other children who accepted their differences.

The Young Adults discovered that the children responded well to the story, especially the emphasis on being different rather than having a disability. Recently the Young Adults and the children participated in the [#DrawDisability](#) contest sponsored by the United Nations' Global Observatory for Inclusion. Strengthened by the discussions they had with the Young Adults, the children rejected the idea of disability in favour of stories of friendships among animals who are different from their peers, including a shark with no fin and a dinosaur with one arm.



Tu Y Yo means “You and I” in Spanish

Participation in Tu Y Yo has helped build community among the children on the ASD and their siblings who often have to defend their brother or sister. It has also helped the Young Adults gain leadership and public speaking skills.



Virginia Murray, a third year college student, said that she enjoys helping and educating “people who had similar problems to me.” Carlos Espinoza is studying for a career in aviation administration and noted that his favourite part of Tu Y Yo is teamwork and “seeing an impact occur.” Arturo Cabral credits the various presentations on autism that he has given in schools as helping him become more independent and confident. Twins David and Carlos Ovalle enjoy the active “ice-breaker” games they help lead in Tu Y Yo and believe these games help social integration. Finally, Phillip Marsh, an aspiring accountant who has emerged as the leader and coordinator of Tu Y Yo, identified the sense of community he has developed with the other Young Adults as the best part of the programme.

For the immigrant Hispanic children on the ASD, their siblings, and the Young Adults, participation in Tu Y Yo has helped them develop a strong sense of community and view their condition not as a disability, but as a difference. It has helped them find their voice and explain to school officials, teachers, and classmates what autism is and how they would like to be treated. For themselves, their parents and the wider community, there is no stronger voice.

